

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

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OPENING



FREE

TIMES

6,600 CIRCULATED
FREE EVERY MONTH

JULY 1998

Stuff This, Great Bass

Bass, the second largest brewer in the country, continues to shun the cask ale market. Apart from a programme of brewery closures, they now seem bent on killing demand for at least one of their remaining cask ales by reducing it to a shadow of its former self.

Stones Bitter, seen locally on the bars of many Greenalls pubs, was until recently a reasonable 3.9% alcohol by volume (ABV). Bass dropped this to 3.8%, rendering it a "weak and insipid drink" in the views of some. The next ploy is to reduce it further to 3.7%.

The Stones brewery in Sheffield is to close next January and trial brews are under way in Burton to develop a 3.7% 'match' of the Sheffield brew. Bass have given the usual assurances that the future of Stones Bitter is guaranteed but it is already a different beer from the Stone's of last year and a move from Sheffield will result in yet more changes to the flavour. Despite what Bass might say, experience has shown that you cannot match recipes.

Bass have, of course, denied any ulterior motives in all of this. Spokeswoman Lesley Allman claimed that the strength of Stones had been reduced "with the best of reasons - to allow the brand to fight its corner fully alongside beers like Tetley's Bitter and Boddingtons which fall in the same strength range". She added that Stones remained important to Bass, and that if there had been any intention to de-list the beer then this would have been done with a clear-cut decision rather than in any roundabout way.

However for CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, this is a familiar story. Over the years we have seen the national brewers become as adept at driving down demand for beers they no longer wish to produce in the long-term as they are in promoting their latest drinks fad. The pattern is always the same. A beer may have a strong local following but doesn't fit in with the current national strategy so it is subject to 'death by a thousand cuts'. Reduce the strength, eliminate the character, cut back, or even abandon, promotion (but slowly over a couple of years or so), take it out of as many pubs as possible (in cask form at least) and push your favoured beer for all it's worth. Hey presto! Suddenly you have a beer for which there is no longer any 'demand' and which can either be axed or, if some of your customers still insist on drinking it, contracted out to another brewery (and then axed). Far fetched? Hardly, that sequence of events neatly describes the history of another famous ale with a strong local following, Charrington IPA. Once the biggest selling beer in London it has now vanished from the brewing scene. And who oversaw the decline of that once-proud beer? You guessed...Bass, of course.

In JULY'S OPENING TIMES

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and now for some good news....

Sportsman, Hyde

Licensee Geoff Oliver is currently in the middle of a major overhaul of the Sportsman in Hyde, a pub which has rapidly become the town's premier outlet for cask beer.

The work is being carried out carefully, where possible using local builders and locally obtained materials, with the aim of both restoring the building's original character and making the pub more like an 'alehouse'.

Work will include restoring the sash windows to original, working, condition, renewing only necessary working parts such as pulleys and sash cords; removing the sixties wall to wall carpeting to expose the floorboards for planing and polishing; and replacing the fifties-style fireplaces with genuine Victorian ones. When OT last called work was progressing well. The inside had been repainted, the carpet skipped and the floors of the two left-hand rooms sanded and polished. Cast iron fireplaces had been installed in each room and in the vault wood panelling has been fitted to match the existing panels. The chimneys are also to be swept with a view to burning logs in the winter.

After both interior and exterior decoration, Geoff and Carmel have decided on three main themes. The two main rooms will have an alehouse-type theme, with old and new artefacts and ornaments connected to breweries, the licensed trade and CAMRA. The unusually large passageway down to the catering kitchen, back door and toilets will feature public transport of various types and eras while the bar end of the passageway will be called the "seafarers' corner", particularly highlighting the career of one of the locals, who has been a regular for nearly sixty years.

Geoff has already obtained various artefacts and pictures connected with public transport and seamanship and would welcome any information on these. If you think you can help - or have any memorabilia you would like to donate, ring Geoff on 368 5000.

The unusual long, narrow vault will remain a games room, as it has been for many years. Traditional pub games will be promoted, along with the more recently introduced pool and bar football tables. The Sportsman is at 57 Mottram Road and is well worth a visit.

Exclusive Ale for Buxton Festival

Visitors to the Buxton Festival this month will be able to quench their thirst with an exclusive cask ale brewed specially for the Peak District Arts Festival.

Whim Buxton Festival Bitter, a golden summer ale at 4.6% ABV, will only be available at the Sun Inn on the High Street, which of course is already a regular outlet for Whim Ales, the local microbrewer.

Whim's head brewer, Jo Allsop, has been experimenting with ale recipes and thinks his new brew is of a quality to match the festival - he certainly has a good track record in this respect. The Sun's landlord Graham Taylor is expecting to shift several barrels of the new beer as thousands of visitors flock to the town for the festival between 16 and 26 July. The pub is also planning a special Festival Menu, with a pre-concert supper.

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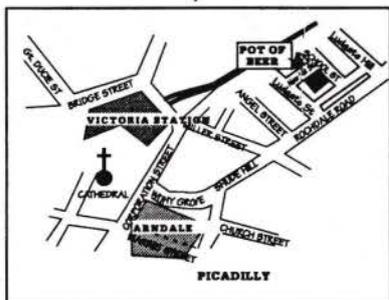
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

No apologies this month for returning to the antics of Bass, fast positioning themselves to become the Watneys of the 21st century. This month we chart the marginalisation of Stone's Bitter, a mainstay of the Sheffield beer drinking scene and a familiar sight on many bars in the Opening Times area. The reason for this seems pretty clear. Bass occupy the third and fifth places in the 'beer top ten' (with Worthington and Stones respectively) behind John Smiths (from Scottish Courage) and Tetley (from Carlsberg-Tetley. By sidelining Stones, while at the same time giving massive promotion to Worthington, they hope to move it to a competitive number two spot. Despite what brewery spokesmen may say, it seems pretty evident that a high level decision has been taken to downgrade Stones which, despite its high ranking in the national stakes, is clearly now regarded as a regional beer when the promotion of 'national brands' is very much the corporate flavour of the month. Furthermore, since the reduction in the strength of Stones will also lead to a reduction of the duty paid on this beer by the brewery, it will be interesting to see whether the duty reduction will be followed by a price reduction at the pumps. Or will Bass add insult to injury by accompanying the downgrade of the beer with a back door price rise? Answers on a postcard please!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Just a brief word about this month's Pub of the Month. It is very easy to be dismissive about the rash of dining pubs that have sprung up in recent years. There seems to be no end to them. And while most sell cask beer, it's usually as an afterthought and often of indifferent quality. But it doesn't have to be like that. All that is needed is enlightened management (at pub and area level) and a little imagination. May I take this opportunity of inviting every Brewer's Fayre, Hungry Horse and Millers Kitchen (etc, etc) area manager along to the Old Mill on 23rd, just to see how it can, and should, be done.

Many thanks to Sheffield CAMRA newsletter 'Beer Matters' for much of this month's material on Bass/Stones. *John Clarke*

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

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Pub Of The Month

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

JULY

1998

CAMRA
CAMPAIGN
FOR REAL ALE
STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER
BRANCH



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA pub of the Month for July is the Old Mill, Cheadle Hulme.

A new pub, only a dozen year old, built to resemble an old-fashioned saw mill and an Allied Domeq 'Big Steak' outlet to boot, the Old Mill is at first site an unlikely Pub of the Month winner. Appearances can be deceptive, however.

Tucked away on Mill Lane, off Ladybridge Road, the Old Mill is situated in pleasant surroundings beside the Ladybrook stream with ample seating for an evening drink by the waterside. Inside, the 'saw mill' actually works very well as a pub. The pub was constructed using reclaimed building materials and the sensitive use of these, combined with a countrified interior gives the impression that the pub is rather older than it actually is. Inside the large single room has a high ceiling and is very well divided on a variety of levels with many separate drinking areas and 'rooms'.

As a 'Big Steak' pub there is quite a high profile for the food operation, which is of good quality and competitively priced with daily specials alongside the fixed menu offerings. However unlike many similar establishments the Old Mill is anything but a food-driven operation with beer tacked on as an afterthought. No, the Old Mill is first and foremost a beer pub. Tetley Bitter and Burton Ale are the regulars and four guests, often from unusual microbreweries and always of high quality accompany these. This is down to the commitment of managers Jon and Judi Laidlaw who from the outset realised that guest beers were the lifeblood of the pub's trade. When one area manager foolishly knocked them on the head for a while, trade took a marked downturn. More enlightened management has now seen the guest beers return, and with a vengeance - the pub has recently run an eight-week beer festival featuring over 100 different beers.

Jon and Judi have shown that it is possible to run a successful destination dining pub and at the same time create a welcoming locals' pub and make it a local haven for beer drinkers. No mean feat and one that makes this award particularly deserving. The presentation night is Thursday, July 23rd, make sure you're there. Buses 368, 369 and 13 run from Stockport and will drop you off near the top of Mill Lane, it runs down the side of the former Seven Arches Garden Centre. The pub is only a 10 minute or so walk from Cheadle Hulme station.

The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.



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CAMRA Pub of the Month

March 1997



3

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A Matter of Choice!

– The Head Brewer's Choice!

Marston's Head Brewer's Choice range of in-house guest beers is now well established and a welcome sight on the bars of many local pubs. Here Marston's Head Brewer Paul Bayley writes exclusively for Opening Times to give the background and history of this innovative scheme.

If choice of cask ale is not as wide as it might be (and too much choice with cask beer can greatly increase the quality risks), then the Head Brewer's Choice could be as good as any! For many people it has been a good policy and a source of enjoyment to customers in many Marston's pubs for the last five years.

It all began as an idea in 1992, 47 different beers and over 100 cask beer brews ago, in the wake of the report from the Monopolies & Mergers Commission into the brewing industry and which resulted in the 'guest beer law'. At that time Marstons were already cross trading heavily with Whitbread and went on to extend the distribution of Pedigree into most National Brewers pubs. Cask beer guesing had become a reality and we, in the opinion of many of our licensees, had just given Pedigree, our (and their) crown jewel, away to all their competitors in rapid succession. Pedigree could be, and in some cases was, on draught at every pub on the High Street. As retailers they needed to be able to offer their customers a choice, and preferably something the opposition did not have.

The opportunity was recognised by Marston's Marketing Director who realised the capability of the brewery. This, as well as many other unique features such as the Burton Unions, is also able to carry out brews between 100 and 1000 barrels with equal ease. This potential for small specialist brews was there and so was an experienced and enthusiastic production team willing to say yes first, and find and overcome the pitfalls afterwards.

The scheme recognised three key factors at the outset. There was the need for quick distribution and turnover so the scheme was limited to cask ale houses with a good turnover where an additional product would not jeopardise throughput of the rest. The need to match sales with production depended on a sufficiently large cask ale customer base and pre-ordering the beers in advance of brewing – a major act of faith by licensees in the brewers skills which was and is much appreciated on our side. Finally there was the need to constantly rotate products. The key to success is customer interest and that is primarily in constantly changing and interesting variety.

An initial scheme was put together for eight beers to be sold over 16 weeks with repeats of the most popular four over a further eight weeks, and we have scarcely paused for breath since – 47 different beers later

(with five more in the pipeline) over five years. The HBC brew changes every two weeks and a series of 12 or 13 brews is now launched over a six-month period and planned up to 12 months ahead.

In planning a programme we aim to repeat the most popular beers from the past no more than once a year and to introduce at least four new beers every year. We normally plan variation within any range to give regular contrast – a strong beer followed by a weaker one or a light one followed by a darker one. As with any living scheme it is constantly changing and amongst other changes we now extend a further choice to licensees who find their customers avoid dark beers by allowing them to take the subsequent pale beer over a four week period.

Ideas for brews may come from marketing or more usually from the brewers but we like to follow two rules. The idea behind a brew should always be real. It may be based on a product, a beer characteristic or style or specific raw material. It can even relate to an occasion or event, although this has its risks to sales continuity when an event is over. We have brewed a 6.2% ABV Strong Ale and a 2.5% Luncheon Ale, an Oatmeal Stout and a Wheat Beer, Single Hop beers and Single Malt or Barley beers. We even grew up Sprat Archer barley and brewed with it for the first time in 50 years. We have celebrated not only Christmas – on one occasion on 1st April – but even sunk to the last refuge of the scoundrel, patriotism, in brewing Regimental Ale for the Staffordshires and Trafalgar for Trafalgar Day. We are thinking about Waterloo Ale (to be collected for your private consumption only, of course – at French duty rates ex-Calais!).

The other important rule is that the product should be mainstream and acceptable as a beer, and clearly identifiable as an ale or stout, or even wheat beer, and be sufficiently good for a customer never to reject a beer out of hand or leave it on the bar. The experiment in trying a new beer should be one of pleasure, possibly of learning, but never of pain. As well as Marston's licensees, other retailers and brewers now take all or part of the range or just single products, sometimes in phase with the main scheme but for large customers sometimes as a stand alone. Head Brewer's Choice can now pop almost anywhere.

Two final points. Since the beer is largely pre-ordered, feedback and customer response is difficult to assess and whilst market research can be enjoyable, too much can be liver threatening. We always welcome and are keen to listen and respond to customers' comments. The more we have the better our response will be. Finally, still on the subject of customer response, having narrowly avoided excommunication as a particular result of Corpus Christi Ale, we are resolved, with the exception of Christmas (when mixing of Faith, Ale and Commerce seems to be acceptable) to avoid any beers celebrating religious festivals. This Head Brewer chooses not to produce a Duvali beer or, worse, a Ramadan Ale. Ayatollas rest easy! We like to think that, as a spin off, we have encouraged interest in beer in general and in the particular drinking establishment at which it is sold. If so, we are very happy, and so, we hope, are our licensees and not least our customers.



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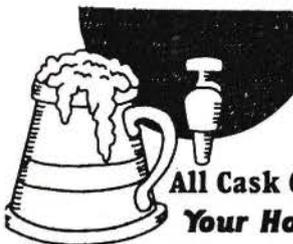
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The following are the Head Brewer's Choice beers for July and August. Look out for them.

Trussing In (5.2% ABV) – a special beer to mark the Trussing In or completion of the apprenticeship of Marston's latest cooper. It has a rich tawny colour with a distinctive bitter flavour.

Dereham Bitter (3.7% ABV) – the malt for this brew is made at Dereham maltings from the 1997 crop barley. A high hop rate gives a refreshing bitter edge to the beer and the Golding dry hop, a pleasing hoppy aroma.

Albion Ale (4.9% ABV) – to mark the centenary of the merger between John Marston and John Thompson and their move into the Albion Brewery in Shobnall, Burton-on-Trent. This beer is a Burton pale ale, pale and strong, with a slightly nutty dry edge.

Copper (4.4% ABV) – a full flavoured amber ale with a high, but well rounded bitterness level, from the best Worcester Fuggle hops.

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Jim Flynn, Organiser Stockport Beer & Cider Festival:
I refer to the front page of last month's OT and would like to build on my quoted comments.

The 1998 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival was a great success. It was very fulfilling and uplifting to find CAMRA members and OT readers coming up to me during the Festival, and since then, to praise all aspects of it. I would like to thank those who have taken the trouble to approach me; nothing is ever perfect but these comments make the time and effort in putting the Festival together all worthwhile.

All this praise together with all the records that were equalled or exceeded this year is down to the hard work, enthusiasm and professionalism of the team managers and deputy managers who put the Festival together. Without them Stockport's premier event for beer and cider drinkers and enthusiasts would not happen. I am sure many OT readers would like to join me in thanking them for their efforts!(Everyone at OT would certainly echo that, Jim - ed.)

From Dave Nunn:

Stockport, like many festivals, appears to have moved towards a beer tickers' selection of beers, rather than actively promote regionally branded beers.

A festival must first and forward promote the general public in discrimination of product when they go to the pub next day, week, year, county or country.

Most festivals, including Stockport, seem to have forgotten that it is CAMRA policy to support Britain's Independent Brewers. Showing a handful of tiny micro brewers' products isn't going to achieve that.

(Dave is quite right in his comments about beer selections at CAMRA beer festivals in general. This very month, new CAMRA Chairman Dave Goodwin echoed his thoughts. His criticisms of the Stockport beer range are wide of the mark, however. Any dedicated member of the 'beer spotting community' will tell you that Stockport Festival has a reputation of most definitely NOT catering for them. And long may it remain so - ed. [Other ed writes...] Well yes but. A balance should be struck, and some festivals manage it very well indeed. Personally I think Stockport errs far TOO far on the pedestrian side, much as does the national bash at Olympia, but everyone is entitled to their opinion.)

Festival Facts

This year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival was visited by people all over the world to see why the Stockport & South Manchester branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, put on such a good bash.

The membership and information stand heard of people who actually came back from holiday and visited the Festival in the same day. Others had driven from various parts of the country with a designated driver taking them back the same evening. And there was one busy couple who came all the way from St Albans to sample some cider before leaving after a few hours, vowing to do their weekend's work on the train home.

But none could beat a couple of beer lovers who came from Canada to visit the town and festival. Brian Trussler and his partner Cindy Vogt, both of them CAMRA members, stayed in a local hotel for two nights and visited the Festival on both Friday and Saturday evenings. They even visited Manchester's Museum of Science & Industry during their stay and commented on how welcome they were made to feel. They take the award for the Festival's furthest visitors...unless you know different?

Would a Mr Halliwell who purchased two books from the CAMRA Shop at the Festival, and left them behind the stall for safe keeping but failed to pick them up please ring Jim Flynn on 432 1816.

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STAGGER

with Rhys Jones

Gorton Lane was the chosen route, but like so much of east Manchester, it's had its share of pub closures, and the two pubs this Stagger traditionally starts with – the Junction and the Dolphin, on Clowes Street – were sadly among them. So it was that we started in the Traveller's Call on Hyde Road. It's a grand little place, the Travs, old-fashioned and basic in the way that so few pubs are these days, and the overhaul applied by its current licensee has only increased its appeal. In particular it's great to see the back room in regular use again. The handpumped Hydes' Bitter was of good quality, and draught Mild was also available.

Cross the new road, cut through the estate, and you come to the Aces, a modern estate pub named after the local speedway team. Formerly a Whitbread pub, it now boasted a For Sale board. It's a big place, and the large main lounge had a good scattering of customers – not to mention a stack of sound equipment that could have comfortably catered for a major rock concert. The Boddingtons once sold here has been replaced by the dreaded 'smoothflow' keg version, but most of the regulars were ordering pints from the unmarked handpump. They chose wisely, for it was Holt's Bitter and in good form.

It was just as well we'd had two good pints, for there was no real ale to be had in the next three pubs. The Wellington (the Clowes Street one, not the Hyde Road one) has been keg for years and looked as dismal as ever; the Birch Arms, quite a decent looking pub, no longer uses its solitary handpump; while the Gorton Arms, where any evidence of traditional beer – or its former Banks's ownership – has disappeared, seems intent on a plunge yet further downmarket. What a relief, then, to take refuge in the Crown on Valance Close. An old pub set amongst low-rise housing, it offers just one drinking room, but this is well divided into three separate areas, and there's also a beer garden at the back. There's a good mix of customers, and the décor includes some interesting aerial photographs of the area. All this and a friendly pub cat too! The Crown is an excellent little pub that deserves to be better known. There's only one real ale, Chesters Mild, but this was in good condition.

As the Steelworks now sells only keg beer, our next port of call was the Vulcan, better known to many as the Monkey, a good honest two-roomer where an entertainer was setting up in the lounge. The Vulcan sells two comparatively unusual real ales, Wilsons Mild (brewed now by Morlands of Oxfordshire) and Grays Bitter (brewed by Mansfield Brewery). I usually enjoy the mild in here, but on this visit it was rated only average; the Grays, however, was a lot better. The Gardeners Arms is another two-room pub, but on a larger scale than the Vulcan. Avoiding the karaoke in the lounge, we found a well patronised vault with a log-end dartboard and an

impressive collection of trophies. Boddingtons is "smoothflow" here too, but Chesters Mild and Trophy are still on handpump. We didn't try the Trophy, but the Mild was above average.

As the Angel no longer sells real ale, our exploration of Gorton Lane was at an end. But there was still a fair amount of drinking time left, so we thought we'd have a look into the Suburban, the Lees pub near Gorton Market. And what should we see there but a handpump selling the brewery's latest seasonal beer, Archer Stout. This proved to be an absolutely superb pint, rich and chocolatey and comfortably the best beer of the night, so what was intended as a quick one saw us still in the Suburban when the cockle man came round at last orders. The pub itself (which also sells Mild and Bitter on handpump) was Friday night loud, with jukebox in the vault and a Country-and-Irish duo in the lounge, but the beer was simply stunning. A fine end to a varied evening.

Of course this article can only be a snapshot of what a small group (on this occasion a very small group) experienced on one particular night and cannot therefore be taken as a once and for all judgement of either the pubs or the beers they sell. As ever there is only one solution – visit some of them yourselves and see what you think.

Letter from Anglesey – Llythyr ô Fon

North Wales remains a popular venue for a day out or long weekend for many in the Opening Times area. Here our North Wales correspondent Phil Levison presents one of his occasional updates of the drinking scene on Anglesey.

In 1990, about the only guest beer on Anglesey was Old Hookey, which appeared in some Burtonwood pubs, leading to speculation that Burtonwood had bought the Hook Norton Brewery – but they hadn't. Four years later, the position had changed dramatically – the familiar mild and bitter, with perhaps a winter warmer, had suddenly been joined by a flood of new beers – occasional, seasonal, special edition, or just something completely different.

Now, in 1998, the position on Anglesey is largely unchanged, with a good selection of beers now available, particularly in the free houses. The so-called "Famous Four" (Burtonwood, Greenalls, Lees and Robinson's) still account for about half the pubs on the island. There have been major refurbishments at the Gaerwen Arms on the A5, and Lees' Glanrefon in Benllech, also at Robinson's Foundry Vaults and Greenalls' Market Hotel in Llangefni.

Long-standing visitors to Anglesey will probably remember the "Cali" with affection. This was the California, just outside Benllech. It changed hands several times, and became very run down in the early nineties, finally closing for several years. In 1995, major structural alterations were carried out, including the addition of a new conservatory, kitchen and dining room; and en-suite accommodation. It finally reopened with a single cask beer, Tetley Bitter, and an almost complete change of character. Rumours have been circulating that Robinson's have bought it – it was due to reopen as a Robinson's pub on Monday 22 June. Tony Hargreaves, licensee of the Breeze Hill in Benllech is taking over the license of the pub and putting his brother Graham in as manager.

There has been no invasion of Anglesey by Wetherspoons or Hogsheads, although just across the Menai Strait in Bangor there is a Tap & Spile, a Hogshead and a (non-brewing) Firkin.

The Nursery Inn



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- ★ Bowling Parties & Function Room.
- ★ Egon Ronay Guide, AA Best of British Gd
- ★ CAMRA Good Food Guide 1994

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Anvil Ales

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Traditional
Cask
Beers

Always in
good taste



is unwell,
but....

next month sees no less than two articles from our eponymous columnist, a review of recent beer festivals (illness having apparently prevented nothing...Dudley, Catford, Derby, Canterbury and the Great British Beer Festival) and the long promised day trips from Munich - in good time for those brave souls (*more like idiots - BM™*) attempting the Octoberfest. Apparently a day in the Alps, a couple of (or three) monasteries and a rare-breeds pig farm (and brewery!) are promised. Full details of public transport are to be included.



Saving Electricity

Looking through a list of beers available in Stockport pubs fifteen years ago, I was struck by the fact that getting on for half of the real ale was in those days served by electric pump – almost always into oversize glasses. Nowadays, the figure is probably little more than five per cent, as there has been a steady trend to move from electric dispense to handpumps. A major reason behind this is to give a clear symbol of the availability of real ale, which can be ambiguous with electric pumps. However, another factor must have been the opportunity to replace oversize glasses with brim measures, thus increasing profit margins by about five per cent without any price rise. I don't recall any of these pubs cutting their prices at the same time!

Far from being a nasty modern innovation, electric real ale pumps have now become an endangered part of our beer drinking heritage, in just the same way as 1950s pub interiors. The once-common cylindrical diaphragm dispensers have completely vanished from our bar tops, while few will now remember the strange spherical diaphragm pumps that were once found in many Wilsons' pubs. And what about the metered pumps in Ward's pubs in the Sheffield area that dispensed pints – no namby-pamby halves there! Even Banks's, who for long were the main champions of electric pumps, are now busy switching their pubs over to handpumps.

Surely CAMRA should be fighting to preserve the remaining examples of electric real ale dispense as quirky survivors of a vanished era, particularly as they generally remain the best guarantee of a full pint. Life would be very boring if every single pub served up its beer in exactly the same way.

Soft Thinking

A complaint often heard about pubs is that they charge exorbitant prices for soft drinks, and it's certainly true that they can impose some pretty steep mark-ups. But you've got to remember that pub prices have to cover expenses such as heating, lighting, cleaning and staff wages, and represent much more than simply the cost of the drink plus a profit margin. The amount of these resources you consume when drinking a soft drink is just the same as with a pint of beer. Licensees have to make a living, and if they cut the price of soft drinks they would have to recoup the income somewhere else – probably on the price of beer. If my pint is being subsidised a bit by soft drinks, then I'm not complaining – after all, the main purpose of a pub is selling beer, while soft drinks are just a sideline. It is also suggested that high soft drink prices act as an encouragement to drink-driving. This is the kind of pious notion which is initially credible, but when you examine it more closely is revealed as total rubbish. It is no more logical than arguing that happy hours or Holt's beer prices encourage drink-driving. I would be amazed if there has ever been a single case where someone has been

5 Years Ago

JULY '93

by Phil Levison

The headline was 'DOUBLE WHAMMY!' and referred to how some brewers (Bass and Courage) were reducing the strength of some of their beers, and putting up the prices. These changes had come on top of the budget increases which had seen up to 5p going on the price of a pint. The decision to reduce beer strength had been blamed on the new system of collecting beer duty which had come into force the previous month. Under the old system, duty was paid on the amount of sugar in the beer before fermenting began, using the original gravity as a measure. The new system charged duty according to the strength of the beer as it left the brewery – the so-called 'factory gate' method.

The 1993 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival had been the first to be held at its new venue, Stockport Town Hall, and it had inevitably suffered some teething problems. Comments had been received about three things in particular – there was no hot food, the music was too loud and a large turnout on Thursday night reduced the choice of beer available on Friday night. All these points had been noted, and appropriate action was promised.

'Who owns Ruddles?' was the question. In the early days of the Real Ale revolution, the name was revered in beer drinking circles, with Ruddles County, at 5% ABV, achieving near cult status. The Ruddle family sold out to Grand Met in 1986, and they in turn sold out to Courage. Then in 1992 independent Dutch brewer Grolsch acquired the brewery. But they still supplied the beer to Courage who in turn supplied it to the pubs. When Courage announced that Ruddles Bitter and County were to be reduced in strength, Grolsch said they had nothing to do with Courage, and the beers had always been declared at the lower strengths. All very confusing.

Finally, an item on the last page was headed 'Ridiculous & Sublime'. Ups N Downs in Stockport centre had been revamped as a 'Fun & Muzik' pub called the Beez Neez – it was all loud music, flashing lights and keg beer (from Burtonwood).

The Ladybrook in Bramhall had been refurbished, and Boddies Mild, Bitter and a rotating guest beer were on offer. The snooker room containing two full sized tables been retained. The snooker tables have now gone, as have the Mild and the guest beer. Last month's OT said Bass was available – is it still there?

7

convicted after staying on beer because he reckoned the lemonade was too dear. In real life, nobody's decision as to how much alcohol to drink before driving is going to be swayed by a few pence one way or the other on the price of orange juice. In any case, while there may be a higher mark-up on soft drinks, they are rarely any more expensive than beer, particularly considering that they are not going to be swilled in pints in the same way.

MITCH

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BREWERY NEWS

The Marble Brewery continues to roll out a stream of beers. Available from last month was a 6% ABV Ginger Beer, which retailed in the pub at a not-inconsiderable £2.25 a pint(!). Some reports also reach us that the aftermath of the Ginger Beer could be tasted in a subsequent batch of the excellent IPA. Since these same reports are uniformly favourable, perhaps a Ginger IPA would be something to consider as a regular brew. Speaking of the IPA, a slightly reformulated version of this, brewed with American Liberty Hops, should be available in the pub on July 4th. Look out too, for an earlier than expected reappearance of Mckenna's Revenge Porter. Originally off the menu until October, this, too, will be making a reappearance later this month due to popular demand.

Sunderland brewers Vaux, well represented locally, were the recipients of an unwanted take-over approach last month. The bidder was thought to be the Stakis group who had their eyes on Vaux's profitable Swallow Hotels chain. If successful the bid would almost certainly have seen the break-up of Vaux with the brewing and pubs side hived off. While negotiations eventually came to nought, Vaux is deemed to be 'in play' as they say in the City, that is to say potentially up for grabs by some other unwelcome suitor. Bass, Whitbread and Greenalls have all been mentioned in this connection but the chances are that Vaux will retain its independence for the foreseeable future.

Hyde's Anvil launch their latest seasonal beer this month. Maris Gold is an all-malt brew described as 'light, very drinkable and extremely refreshing'. Hydes' have also just appointed their



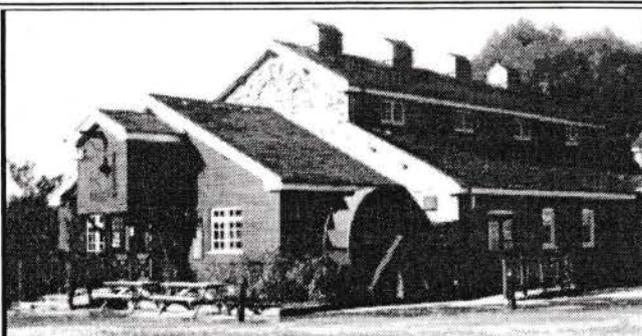
first non-family chief executive. Chris Hopkins comes from 15 years at Courage and aims to launch Hydes' on the national scene with the introduction of a premium beer (hurray) and has also said the company may launch its own 'pub brand' (hmm...).

Suffolk brewers Greene King have an increasingly high profile locally via their ownership of the former Magic Pub Co. They have recently announced that their premium Abbot Ale is continuing to build sales - 11% up last year - in an overall declining cask ale market. This is a familiar tale with many regional brewers which makes you wonder just whose cask sales are diving to such an extent that the whole sector is taking a dip. Hello, Bass. Greene King, meanwhile, attribute the continued growth of Abbot Ale to its reformulation two years ago by Head Brewer Alistair Heeley. This involved a slower fermentation period which meant that the "distinctive bitterness and fruity esters could be retained while some of the harsher tones of the original flavour were knocked off". Another Greene King beer to look out for in the off-trade is the bottled Strong Suffolk which has just won a gold medal at the Brewing Industry International Awards. This unique 6% beer is the only one in the country whose main constituent is matured in 100-barrel oak vats for two years and is then blended with a younger fresher ale. The only other brewery to produce a beer in this way is in Belgium so Suffolk Strong is in good company.

The ever-reliable Phoenix Brewery of Heywood has three new beers out this month. Arizona is a 4.1% ABV very pale brew. More dry than hoppy in character, if it takes off it could be available all summer. Tennis Elbow comes in at a stronger 4.5% and will be out from the middle to the end of the month. Finally, One For The Wode makes a reappearance this month. At 4.3% this is similar to the popular Mayfly in that it will be bitter and very hoppy. Look out for these in the local free trade - they will almost certainly all appear at Sand Bar on Grosvenor St, just off Oxford Road in the City Centre.



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HOPWOOD
Pale coloured bitter, clean tasting session beer with a bitter hop finish.



BANTAM
Pale brown bitter. Slightly nutty, full flavoured beer.



BEST BITTER
Tawny coloured, with a hint of sweetness in the full bitter palate. A fresh but dry hop finish.



OLD OAK
Well balanced brown beer. Malt and hops balance the strong fruitiness in the aroma and taste. The finish is malty, fruity and dry.



THRISTY MOON
Light brown bitter. Strong hop aroma. The slight malteness is dominated by a full crisp bitterness giving a dry and satisfying finish.



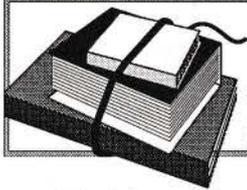
BONNEVILLE
Light brown bitter. Malty character with a soft rounded hop balance.



DOUBLE DAGGER
Pale brown bitter. Full flavoured hoppy bitterness. More pleasantly dry and lighter than its gravity would suggest.



WOBBLY BOB
Apricot beer. Malty, fruity aroma. Strongly malty and fruity flavour. A slight sweetness yields to a dry finish.



BOOK REVIEW



Out Inn Cheshire, Cheshire CAMRA branches, 144pp, £4.95

The last CAMRA guide to all Cheshire's pubs came out eleven years ago, in 1987, and in its day set an example of how it should be done. Since then, the number of real ale outlets has increased by over 200 to 874 – over 80% of the county's pubs – and, with all the upheavals in the brewing industry, there is probably scarcely a single pub still in the same ownership and offering the same range of beers. A new guide to the county is therefore long overdue, and it has now appeared in the shape of "Out Inn Cheshire", a substantial volume of 144 pages plus an extended colour section.

The cover has a striking photograph of the ancient, half-timbered White Lion at Barthomley, possible the archetypal Cheshire country inn. It is reassuring to read in the description of this establishment that "the presence of sleeping cats testifies to the relaxed atmosphere" as indeed it did when I last visited the pub.

A hundred "flagship" pubs are identified and given extended descriptions together with a photograph. Most of these are the attractive country inns for which the county is best known, but the selection also includes some lesser-known urban gems such as the Castle in Macclesfield and the Builders Arms in Knutsford. Cheshire, however, is let down by its urban pubs, and the choice in Chester itself is very disappointing compared to other cities of similar historic character and tourist appeal, most notably York. Full details including opening hours are also given for the non-flagship pubs, which often receive a full write-up which would not disgrace highlighted entries in many other guides.

The guide is illustrated throughout with black-and-white photographs, and in the centre there are 24 pages of superb colour pictures, which include interiors, unusual features and pub signs as well as the more usual outside shots. Scattered throughout are a series of articles that cover all the usual campaigning points together with tourist information such as the Cheshire Canal Ring and the Sandstone and Gritstone trails. An unusual one that I have not seen before is the piece on real ale drinking from a female perspective.

"Out Inn Cheshire" would benefit from a proper map locating every place name listed (where on earth is Woolstanwood, for example?), although there is an index of pub names and places. The typeface is also very small, but this is excused to some extent by the vast amount of information included. However, these are only minor quibbles about a book which in most respects is excellent, and editors George Symes and Simon Scott must be congratulated on their hard work in putting together a comprehensive guide to a county where CAMRA's resources are often spread rather thinly.

The cover price of £4.95 is on the expensive side for a pub guide, but it is well worth it for one that is so attractive and well-produced and contains so much of interest. It will make a great present for anyone interested in the county and its pubs, and will no doubt prompt many journeys of discovery during the coming months. PE.

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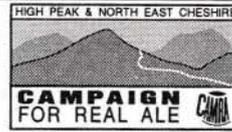
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WITH TIM JONES
CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE CAMRA



July Featured Pub: The Romper, Marple.

Or how to walk to a country pub the easy way.

Marple Ridge, Ridge Road, Marple, continuation of Church Lane, OS SD965 866, Buses 389/394 to The Crown, Hawk Green, 383/384 to The Navigation.

First licensed in 1872 as a beer house The Farmers Arms by Thomas Carrington a farmer, to supply the workers and travellers in the area. It then consisted of one of three adjoining stone built cottages. Over the years it has been extended into the other two cottages.

It was known to the locals as the Rompling Kittlin due to Toms many cats. The name was changed to **The Romper** in 1950 when the last cottage was taken over and a full licence granted. Inside are two bars and host of cozy drinking areas on many levels, reflecting the original cottages. This is not as is too often found these days a bare sanded floor and fake nicotine interior, any refurbishment has been done in a tasteful manner in keeping with the original buildings. The Romper is a baseball cap free zone! The present licensees are Geof, and Patty Barnett, a Cheshire lad and a Minnesota lass. Geof is an ex pro footballer who played for Arsenal against Leeds in the 72 cup final before moving to the States in 76 where he met his wife Patty.

They returned to the UK in 92 and took over the Romper in 94. Set just below the peak of the ridge the Romper affords excellent views from the raised patio, an ideal place for a summer drink, Food ranging from a snack to a full meal is available from 12.00-2.00 Mon.-Fri. Sat. 12.00-3.30 Sun. all day, eves from 6.30, for those in need of refuelling.

The range of beers, whilst not being the most adventurous is always well kept. Boddies, Pedigree, O.P. and Tims Landlord, with the Tims being more to my taste on this visit. (well it was a hot day, not the best time to drink OP). Being a little way out of Marple centre, (about a 25 minute walk via the road) means that a fair number of visitors arrive by car. However this need not be a disadvantage, as it is possible to walk from Marple town centre or Marple Station to the Romper almost entirely off road via the Peak Forest canal and returning via public footpaths and the Macclesfield canal.

From the station turn up the hill and then left on to the canal towpath. Follow the locks to the marina, after having passed through what must be unique a tunnel shaped for access by a horse! (the Navigation to the right). The canal splits here, one arm goes to Macclesfield, the other to Whaley Bridge. Take the arm to Whaley, in about 3/4 of a mile you will come across the brickbridge one of many roving bridges. on the Cheshire Ring continue along the towpath to the next stone bridge and walk up the (closed) road to the Romper. To return, follow the track next to the carpark down to Batesons farm, (staple crop, venison). It is not recommended to take a dog into the deer compound when the does have young. Not even dogs the size of mine (120 lbs each) are safe. Rejoin the tow path by turning first left past the compound (The Goyt Mill which you will pass was Britain's largest cotton mill in its day) and follow the towpath back to Marple, where you have the choice of either the Ring O Bells or the Navigation, two very different pubs both serving Robbies.

The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch Contact is
Tom Lord (0161 837 4474 (h) 0161 427 7099 (h))

In Marple - after the loss of Holt's at the Bowling Green, the beer range has been decided as Wilson's Bitter, Theakstons Bitter and Banks's Mild.

But, as one door shuts...the Victoria in Hadfield which introduced Holt's temporarily in May has now made it permanent. The price will be held at £1.12 a pint until 2 January 1999. In Marple Bridge/Glossop, the Rock Tavern's range of beers is now Hansons Mild, Banks's Bitter, Taylors Landlord and Tetley Bitter. Meanwhile in Buxton (not north of Stockport as intimated in the CAMRA Calling section), the Swan Hotel now has two guest real ales on a regular basis.

The excellent refurbishment of the Sportsman in Hyde is reported in detail elsewhere. Geoff and Carmel seem to have been tweaking the pub quietly ever since they arrived. It started with the beer range and continues with the décor. A much more genteel and gentle way to improve a pub than the usual eight-week rip-out riding rough-shod over the regulars. They should be congratulated on the continued success of the Sportsman.



There are now only 7 weeks until the Shambles was due to re-open - but it's still a hole in the ground! -

SO GUESS WHAT - THERE'S A 'NEW' OPENING DATE - NEXT MARCH - ONLY 6 MONTHS LATE!!!!

10 and as to the tale in the Metro News about the "brick by brick" preservation of Sinclairs - what about the Jackhammers they used to reduce it to rubble- eh?

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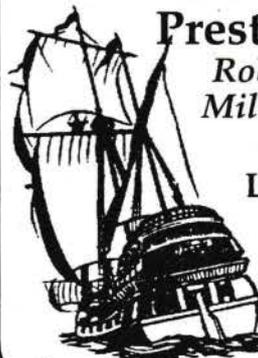
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21st National Festival

Christine Cryne looks back

This year CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale's Great British Beer Festival is 21 years old. It is the biggest beer festival in the UK and has a larger variety of beers on sale than the famous Munich Beer Festival. With over 1000 volunteers from all over the country serving over a quarter of a million pints it will again be a celebration of good ale.

The Festival started off in Alexandra Palace in North London where it stayed for several years until the venue burnt down in 1980. At one of these events, the Monty Python comic, Terry Jones, opened the Festival by pouring a pint of beer over his head!

The Festival then moved to Leeds and into an ex tram shed called the Queens Hall where it stayed for two years. There was then a one-year sojourn to the Bingley Hall in Birmingham which...burnt down (in 1984). Birmingham saw the introduction of a family area, which really came into its own when the festival moved to Brighton in 1985.

At this time there was no all-day licensing and the volunteer staff used to enjoy a break between sessions on the beach. Brighton hosted the Festival for three years before the event went north again to Leeds. Unfortunately, the hall closed in 1990 to make way for a car park. This led to the Festival going to Brighton for a fill-in year before heading to the Capital. The 1991 Festival was held in the Docklands Arena. Although a great venue for seating, poor transport led to another change. From 1992, the Great British Beer Festival has been held at Olympia. It started off in the Grand and West Halls and has now migrated into the National Hall as well (a mini version of the Grand Hall). Over the years in London, the imported beer bar has grown, the entertainment is more varied and the food more different. But the one thing that has not altered is the commitment to British real ale.

At the early Festivals it was possible to feature every real ale brewery (about 90 in '77). Now there are over 400 breweries including the growing number of pub breweries. With most breweries having over three beers, there are now 2000+ real ales. The 1998 Great British Beer Festival will have over 300, providing a good selection of the best real ales in Britain. There can be no better way to celebrate real ale than by joining in the celebrations at this year's Great British Beer Festival.

Cheshire Lines Tavern

It was some time ago that Opening Times learnt that Banks's were unhappy with the image and performance of the Station at Cheadle and they have now taken the opportunity to give the pub a major facelift and refocus the pub away from the youth market.

The designer bottled beers have largely been withdrawn, the loud jukebox replaced by more soothing, quieter 'canned' music and the electric dispensed beers (some keg, some cask) have been replaced by handpumped cask ales. On OT's visit these included Banks's Bitter, Pipkin, a premium seasonal ale, and Cameron's Strongarm. The Pipkin is a 'guest' beer and may change to a monthly rotating guest, albeit from a small list, in the future.

In common with other Banks's refurbishments, quality materials have been used throughout. The furnishings are traditional with a wooden bar and simple but practical (for dining) tables with the obligatory mismatching chairs. The recently refurbished Didsbury has exactly the same problem - perhaps the two could get together and produce a matching set between them!

Very much a restaurant/dining pub, there is an emphasis on food with the pub employing its own chef who produces freshly cooked (not reheated) main meals in the £5 to £10 range.

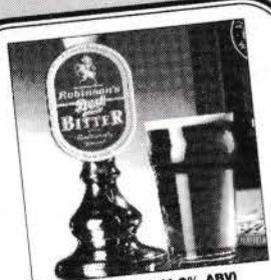
All in all an improvement on its predecessor. Some things I liked, particularly the 'non-advertising' policy. The Cheshire Lines is not signed as a Banks's pub and inside there is no promotional material on beer mats, bar towels, ashtrays or posters to remind you that it is. The drawback however is that this means there are no beer mats on the tables and ashtrays are scarce. When the pub gets busy the tables are likely to be awash with beer. I gathered that in the short time since it reopened I was not the first person to complain about the lack of beer mats as the manager had a secret supply which he strictly rationed (don't tell the brewery!). Complain in the right way and he might give you one!

SB.

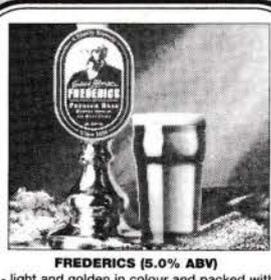
Contributors to Opening Times Issue 171: John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Rhys Jones, Peter Edwardson, Stuart Ballantyne, Christine Cryne, John Reek, Jim Bowden, Brian Kemp, Paul Marsden, Paul Bayley, Steve McCarley, Jim Flynn, Brian Kemp, John Tune



THE Robinson's COLLECTION



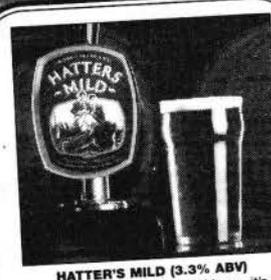
BEST BITTER (4.2% ABV)
- pale and bright with a full bitterness derived from choice aroma hops.



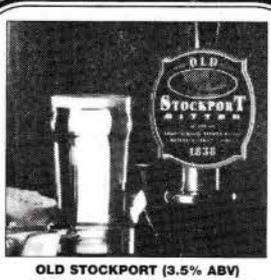
FREDERICS (5.0% ABV)
- light and golden in colour and packed with flavour. Named after the brewery's founder. Also available in bottles.



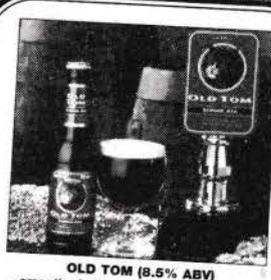
XB (4.0% ABV)
- a smooth bitter ale with a malty taste. First brewed in the Lake District.



HATTER'S MILD (3.3% ABV)
- brewed from quality malt and hops, it's the best cask conditioned, light mild around.

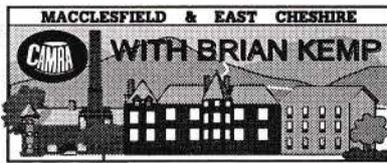


OLD STOCKPORT (3.5% ABV)
- rich golden body with a refreshingly hoppy taste and lightish alcohol content.



OLD TOM (8.5% ABV)
- smooth, dark and mellow. Brewed from a recipe almost as old as the brewery itself.

C H O I C E B E E R S



I am finding it increasingly difficult to write articles about individual Macclesfield pubs which accounts for the absence of this article from last month's OT. No matter, this month I have chosen to write about the character of the town to which I moved 25 years ago from London, rather than any specific pub.

The local newspaper recently announced that the Victoria Park Flats are due to be demolished. I remember when I came to what was then ICI for an interview in 1974 being appalled that such an eyesore could have been allowed to be built in what was a characterful old mill town. I had thought such monstrosities were confined to the big cities like the one from which I had escaped.

During the recent local election campaign we received a handbill from the Conservative Party proudly claiming popular support for their decision to authorise the demolition. They conveniently forgot to mention, I imagine, that they were the controlling party that approved their construction back in 1968. The area of the town in which they were built had previously been a maze of streets with typical terraced cottages and pubs, which nowadays would have been the subject of a major renovation and refurbishment scheme. I am told that the destruction of this part of town was an early motivation to Rod Hackney (since President of the Royal Institute of British Architects and advisor to the Prince of Wales) to undertake the award-winning renovation of the Black Road area of town.

Anyway, back to the pubs. Today the area is served by three. Robinson's Woodman is a typical 1960's estate pub built, I guess, at the same time as the flats. During my last visit it sold decent mild and bitter and I presume it was a replacement for the old Woodman first licensed in 1844 and closed in 1970. The Bull on Buxton Road is another Robinson's pub of similar vintage and character, and also sold decent beer on my

last visit. Its predecessor was an imposing black and white mock-Tudor building bought by Bells of Stockport in 1882, and passed to Robinson's in 1949 as part of the take-over. It closed in 1971 and was demolished shortly thereafter. When I moved to Macclesfield, the old licensees, Jack and Vera, used to be regulars in the Bridgewater and spoke fondly of the old pub. Then there is the Durham Ox, now a Vaux pub selling Vaux Samson and Wards Bitter during my last visit, and with a very loud jukebox.

Other pubs demolished as part of the redevelopment area included the California, Concert Tavern, Hanging Gate, Royal Oak (I think that's where Kwik-Fit is now), the Shakespeare, the Wheatsheaf, and the Waterloo which closed in 1968. Its licensees, Jock and Jose Crawford, moved on to the Railway View (featured in OT before) and then the Star Inn on London Road, now sadly neglected by Marston's (also featured in OT). There was also the Elephant & Castle dating from 1850 and apparently known locally as the 'Rubber Pig'. I owe much of this historical detail to Paul Wreglesworth's definitive book on the 'Pubs and Breweries of Macclesfield' and can do no better than quote his concluding paragraph from this section of his book.

"In the late 1960's the area was completely cleared, to be replaced by the flats complex which now stands so incongruously alongside the splendour of Arighi Bianchi's Victorian furniture showrooms. The residents moved to new properties in Hursfield, or to the Moss or Weston estates. But more than mere bricks and mortar were lost with the demolition of the Commercial Road area - a whole community vanished". In the current era of theme and mock-old pubs one wonders whether commerce and local government will ever learn the lessons of the past.

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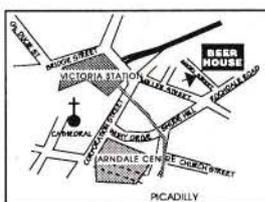
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Improvements continue to be made at the Station in Didsbury, the latest of which is the introduction of a 'second' beer garden., this time at the rear of the pub. As with most things at the Station, it is not huge but it is well executed. Three tables with chairs have been added in the former back yard which has been whitewashed and dotted with plants. It is a veritable sun trap and a very pleasant place to sit on warm summer afternoons and evenings. Meanwhile across the road the new Hogshead continues to take shape and should be opening soon.

In Cheadle, the Royal Oak is still closed following the electrical fire. Scaffolding now surrounds the pub and it looks as though a major renovation is in progress. Staying with Robinson's, the Arden Arms on Millgate, Stockport, was closed as we went to press, awaiting new tenants. The Chequered Flag in Hulme is closed and for sale. Convenient for much of the area's new housing, it should have reasonable potential. Also closed and for sale is The Captains Bar on Rochdale Road, just out from the Marble Arch.

Real ale losses this month include in the Gorton area, the Birch Arms, the Gorton Arms and the Steelworks Tavern. Also the Tatton Arms in Northenden no longer sells the real thing. What a waste of a great riverside site!

The re-opened Halfway House in Openshaw, however, does now sell cask beer in the form of Flowers IPA on handpump. Staying in east Manchester, at the Aces in West Gorton cask Boddingtons Bitter has been replaced by the 'smooth' keg version. Holt's Bitter remains available on handpump.

There's a new café-bar on Whitworth Street in the City Centre. Sadly, however, Internazionale sells no real ale. That should not be the case at a new venture on Great Bridgewater Street where Lees are to open a new city centre outlet by the name of 'Number 80'.

The bar at the Mawson in Chorlton-on-Medlock has been refitted in keeping with the pub's unspoilt interior. There's a possibility of an additional draught beer being introduced, too. Bulmers Old Hazy traditional cider has been withdrawn as part of a general rationalisation of the company's brands. Alternatives available to licensees are Bulmers Traditional or Stonehouse from Bulmers' Devon subsidiary Inch's. Most of the local Hogshead pubs seem to be opting for the Inch's.

At last! Work has finally started on Winter's on Underbank, Stockport. We understand that the town centre's first Holt's pub should be open by the end of August. Also scheduled for an August opening is the Cheadle Hulme Wetherspoon's. Speaking of which, the Wetherspoon organisation continues to search for local outlets having attempted, and failed, to buy the Savoy cinema in Heaton Moor.

We reported last month on the conversion of the Moor Top, Heaton Moor into a 'John Barras' community local by Scottish Courage. Two other local pubs also look to be in line for the same treatment, the Strawberry Gardens in Offerton and, unusually, the Withington Ale House.

The Tut n' Shive in Heaton Chapel has returned to its former self, the Chapel House. Gone is the exotic décor (doors on the ceiling etc.) and now we find a bland refurbishment with 'entertainment' and large screen TV. With all this blandness comes the demise of real ale and its replacement with bland nitroleg beers. How long will this latest metamorphosis last? Best guess from previous form is 2-3 years. One to miss!

In Macclesfield, the Waters Green will be holding a mini-festival of Scottish beers in August for two weeks. Hopefully more news next month. Apologies to the Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. In last month's ad we incorrectly stated that the pub only opened all day at weekends. Not so - the pub is open all day, every day. Well worth a visit it is, too. When OT called recently the Robinson's Best Bitter was on particularly fine form. Landlord Ian Bailey tells us that trade has been very good since he took over and it is certainly a busy pub these days. Ian tells us that minor alterations are planned to incorporate the disused off-sales area into the lounge, the extra space being used to accommodate a piano for old-fashioned pub singalongs.

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Opening Times is slightly late due to illness. Sorry.
The August Issue will follow the end of The Great
British Beer Festival at Olympia (14th August ...ish)

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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries
Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak and Macclesfield. Members of all branches are welcome at each other's events!

Diary

July 98

Monday 6th - Social: Lass O' Gowrie, Charles St, Manchester City Centre. Starts 9.00pm
Thursday 9th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8pm.
Sunday 12th - Curry Crawl in Rusholme: 6.00pm Osborne House, Victory St, eat around 7pm and afterwards by mutual agreement.
Monday 13th - Offerton Social: 9.00pm Gardeners Arms, Little St; 10.00 Victoria, Hall St.
Friday 17th - Higher Openshaw Stagger: 7.00pm Pack Horse, Ashton Old Road; 8.30 Oddfellows, Abbey Hey Lane.
Monday 20th - Didsbury Social: 9.00pm Didsbury; 10.00pm Olde Cock. Both Wilmslow Road.
Thursday 23rd - Pub of the Month presentation to the Old Mill, Cheadle Hulme. A minibus will run to this - phone John on 477 1973 for details.
Saturday 25th - Visit to Roosters Brewery and Harrogate area. Minibus leaves Royal Oak, Didsbury 8.45am; Crown, Heaton Lane 9.00am. Phone 477 1973 for details.
Monday 27th - Social: Royal Oak, Commercial Road, Hazel Grove. Starts 9.00pm.
Wednesday 29th - Joint Social with North Manchester Branch. BBQ at Queens Arms, Honey St, Cheetham. Starts 8.00pm.

July 98

Saturday 1st August - Trip to Andechs Monastery for beery lunch with curry to follow. Meet Marienplatz, Munich 11.30 EST. (? - ed.)
Monday 4th August - Social: High Grove, Silverdale Road, Gatley.
The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Marple, Bredbury, Woodley, Romiley and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:
Friday 10th - Social in Marple. Contact Tom Lord (427 7099)
Monday 13th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Andrew Arms, Compstall. Starts 8.30pm.
Saturday 18th - Woods Walk; Hebden Bridge to Howarth. Details from Frank Wood on 01457 865426.
Saturday 8th August - Social at the Sportsman in Hyde
Monday 10th - Committee Meeting, Chapel House, Dukinfield.
Monday 17th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.
Apart from Macclesfield and Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have advised us of the following:
Saturday 11th - Social Evening: Hanging Gate, Higher Sutton. Starts 8.00pm.
Monday 27th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Ship, Wincle. Starts 8.00pm.

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner



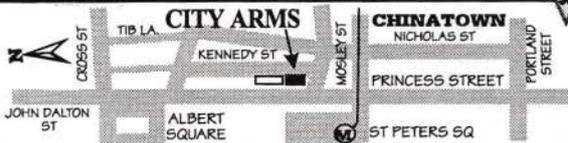
Claire and Howard welcome all their friends and customers

Among our July Beers:
 Batemans Jollys Deuce;
 Greene King Lionheart;
 Shepherd Neame Goldings,
 Canterbury Jack; Broughton
 Brambling Cross;
 Harviestoun Summer Ale;
 Everards Cup Winners Cup;
 Adnams Regatta; Vaux Hovs
 Your Father; Nethergate Old
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8 HANDPUMPS
6 GUEST ALES

LUNCHTIME FOOD
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and 11.30 - 2.00
Saturday



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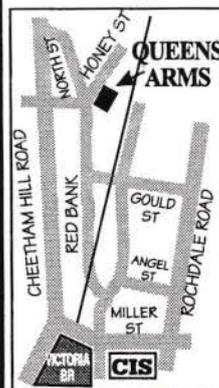


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MANCHESTER MATTERS

Focus On Chorlton

As it's been a slow month for news, I'm taking one of my occasional looks at the pubs of one particular Manchester district - this month Chorlton-cum-Hardy. News from the Manchester pub scene can be found on OT's news pages.

When I first started visiting Manchester, some years ago now, Chorlton was thought of as a rather drab suburb. In recent years, though, it has become a fashionable place to live; and while the pub scene took some time to adjust to the area's new-found status, there's now an excellent choice of beers and pub styles.

If the weather's kind, it's worth the stroll across the meadows to Jackson's Boat, tucked away on the banks of the Mersey. The old building has been greatly remodelled inside in a pseudo-rustic style, but it's been quite well done, offering a good choice of different drinking areas, with outside tables at the back. Handpumped beers are Tetley Bitter, Morland Old Speckled Hen, and a guest from the "Tapster's Choice" range.

Back in Chorlton itself, the Bowling Green is pleasantly situated below the ancient churchyard, but sadly real ale has been only a passing fad here in recent years, and the pub is now all keg again. Across the village green, the Horse & Jockey presents an attractive mock-Tudor façade, but a recent visit proved a huge disappointment - the pub now consists of a huge, cavernous, dismal room, with sticky carpet and a lack-lustre range of expensive, poorly-kept Scottish Courage beers. A sadly missed opportunity indeed.

Happily, though, help is at hand, for just round the corner lies the Beech. No great shakes from the outside, inside this is a solidly traditional and well-run three-roomer with a great range of well-kept beers. As well as Boddingtons and Flowers IPA from its owners Whitbread, there's Taylor's (usually Best Bitter as well as Landlord) and often an interesting beer from a small brewery, recently the excellent Eastgate Ale from Weetwood Brewery. The pub has deservedly won many awards, and is without doubt one of Manchester's finest.

Across the road, the Trevor Arms has had some money spent on it by Greenalls. It retains a two-room layout, with a well-used vault, but the smart ideas of Greenalls' marketing department are rather too evident - the pub's signed externally as the "Famous Trevor Arms", and the walls are covered in hackneyed sayings (some of them mis-spelt). For all that, it's a well-liked local, and offers a contrast in style to the Beech. The handpumped beers, decently kept, are Greenalls Festival, Bitter and Original.

Moving north now, the Spread Eagle, despite being a recent conversion from a hotel, has quickly established itself as a typical Holt's pub, offering the brewery's tried and tested formula of quality, no-nonsense



by Rhys Jones

surroundings with a good and cheap pint (mild and bitter on handpump). As you'd expect, the vault here is the best in Chorlton.

Opposite used to be the Lloyds, a good solid pub until Bass turned it into one of their Edwards chain. It now displays at its entrance a long list of prohibitions for potential customers - NO workwear, NO trainers, NO enjoying yourselves (OK, I made that one up). It also sells NO real ale - and last time I looked had almost NO customers. Chorlton does have a couple of other keg-only café bars - Polar, Lead Station - but only Bass have ruined a perfectly good pub to create one.

The Royal Oak, at the main crossroads is a big Whitbread pub retaining few if any original features. Gaming machines abound, and the few seats are dotted round the outside of the large empty spaces. However, it's a perfectly well-run pub of its style, with a predictable Whitbread range of Boddies Bitter, Castle Eden Ale, and Marston's Pedigree on handpump. A little way south on Barlow Moor Road, the Feathers is another large Whitbread pub of broadly similar range and style.

I close, however, with possibly the most innovative development on Chorlton's pub scene in recent years - Bar (now complemented by next-door Bar 2) on Wilbraham Road. Since its opening this has had an excellent range of foreign draught and bottled beers, but the handpumped beers tended to be a somewhat uninteresting collection from the big brewers. This has all changed now, with the introduction of draught beers from the Marble Brewery. So now with excellent beer both British and foreign, friendly helpful staff, a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere, and great food, Bar and Bar 2 perform well on all fronts. They're not cheap - few places in Chorlton are, apart from the Spread Eagle - but they are well worth a visit. And with Marble Arch World Beers off-license due to be turned into a bar, the Marble Arch/Bar operation seems to be taking over Chorlton!

28th/29th/30th August 1998
High Peak & N.E. Cheshire

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(Opening Times 171)

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Steve McCarley, 32 Howden Close, North Reddish, Stockport SK5 6XW

those wishing to join CAMRA who live in the Marple, Bredbury, Woodley or Romiley areas, should write instead to:

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